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THE LOGIC OF THE HOMERIC SIMILE

BY PAUL SHOREY

The similes of Homer have been exhaustively studied from every point of view except that to be adopted here, the use of them, namely, to illustrate the logical quality of Greek thought even in the earliest literature accessible to us. That too may be thought to be implied in Pope's observation that "secure of the main likeness, Homer makes no scruple to play with the circumstances," and it is forced upon the attention in Matthew Arnold's imitation as Gildersleeve would say that the tricks of Attic style become more apparent in Lucian's pastiche. No one writing upon this subject could fail to note in general terms the essential quality of the Homeric simile.¹ But in the interpretation of detail misapprehension is still so frequent as to justify the repetition and development of what everybody is supposed to know. I shall aim at brevity and not encumber the argument with many quotations from the voluminous modern literature on the subject, most of which, however, I have turned over if not read. The substance of what I have to say has been given to my classes for thirty years, and much of it is well developed in Professor Arthur Leslie Keith's Chicago dissertation *Simile and Metaphor in Greek Poetry from Homer to Aeschylus*.² An apology for repeating it may be found in the fact that it is still customary to speak of the Homeric simile as a rudeness or naïveté of primitive art and as exemplifying the concreteness of the early Greek mind, its incapacity for abstractions. The precise contrary is the truth. The Homeric simile is a highly elaborated conventional form employed with consummate conscious art. And so far from being the indication of a defective power of abstraction it distinguishes Homeric poetry in

¹ It was observed before Pope by La Motte and imitated in Marino's *Adone*. Cf. Finsler, *Homer in der Neuzeit*, pp. 89 and 216.

² Overlooked by Drerup in his survey of the literature, *Homerische Poetik*, I, 457, n. 15; cf. also *Classical Philology*, April, 1918, p. 210, and January, 1921, p. 76.

that respect from all other early poetry and indeed to the discerning eye is a prophecy of that abuse of the dialectical and abstract faculties which was destined to overlay and choke out the spirit of imaginative poetry in Greek literature.

There could be no apter illustration of both these points than the famous comparison of Menelaus' blood-stained thigh to the carven ivory cheek piece for a horse stained by a woman of Maeonia or Caria (*Iliad*. iv. 141). Many eminent modern critics have commented on this passage and they generally do what they attribute to Homer—lose themselves in exuberance of detail. Thus James in his *Psychology* generalizes: "A certain richness of the aesthetic nature may therefore easily keep one in the intuitive stage." He then quotes Palmer's translation of our simile and adds: "A man in whom all the incidents of an analogy rise up as vividly as this may be excused for not attending to the ground of the analogy." Much sounder than this dictum of the psychologist is the poet Pope's comment that the Homeric simile "runs out into embellishments . . . which however are so managed as not to overpower the main one." Matthew Arnold's imitation of this simile, or rather his transposition of it into oriental imagery, brings out this point so well, that familiar as the passage is, I must quote it and take it as a text for much that is to follow.

And show'd a sign in faint vermilion points
Prick'd; as a cunning workman, in Pekin,
Pricks with vermilion some clear porcelain vase,
An emperor's gift—at early morn he paints,
And all day long, and, when night comes, the lamp
Lights up his studious forehead and thin hands—
So delicately prick'd the sign appeare'd
On Sohrab's arm, the sign of Rustum's seal.

Here and in

But as a troop of pedlars from Cabool

and in many other instances Arnold exaggerates the Homeric mannerism in the length of the interval and the multiplication of the detail between the introductory "as" and the resumptive "so." In

As when some hunter in the spring has found

this verges on caricature. The description of the slain breeding eagle and her mate that comes winging back to his desolate eyry fills sixteen lines before the application:

As that poor bird flies home, nor knows his loss
So Rustum knew not his own loss, but stood
Over his dying son, and knew him not.

But for the preliminary study of the type Arnold's copies will almost take the place of the originals. "As when some hunter in the spring hath found" is evidently modeled on *Iliad* xi. 113-20 and will help the student to understand it. And

But as a troop of pedlers from Cabool
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.
.
In single file they move and stop their breath
.
.
.
So the pale Persians held their breath for fear,

though not directly patterned on xv. 629 and xvi. 391-93, will assist their interpretation and carefully studied might forestall misapprehension of xvi. 297 ff. (cf. *infra*, p. 247). Further and more definitive analysis of the Homeric simile would not be easy. For the present purpose the best principle of classification would be the degree of isolating abstraction manifested in the selection and treatment of the point of comparison. The line cannot and need not be sharply drawn. But we might distinguish cases where the point of a comparison is a separable material part of the total description, an item as it were in the bill of particulars; where it is a sensuous quality; where it is a determination of space, time, motion, etc., one of the Aristotelian *κοινά*; where it is an action, a feeling or an emotion, an analogy between mind and matter or some other analogy so faint and subtle that it is psychologically almost equivalent to abstraction. It is enough to indicate the principles of such a classification without applying them in detail here.

The detailed study would note, for instance, that long before modern psychology Homer was aware that the same image may be the vehicle of very different meanings. A simile from winnowing, for example, in *Iliad* v. 500 conveys the idea of whitening and in xiii. 587 of an arrow bounding off from a surface. It would also recognize

that while the characteristic Homeric simile turns on a single point there are not lacking cases where this type of simile merges by indefinable gradations into an elaborated and detailed parallelism, as e.g. *Iliad* xi. 475–85 (cf. Cauer², 447), xiii. 137.

But the general question of the true nature of the Homeric simile has more than an abstract and theoretical interest. It affects interpretation and through interpretation the methods of modern conjectural and disintegrating criticism. For the objections of this criticism to our present text sometimes depend on a misunderstanding of Homer's style, and their proposed rearrangements, athetizings, and conjectures sometimes violate its principles. Examples are endless and will continue to multiply so long as philologists read and write hastily to maintain a thesis. Those that I have selected are purely illustrative and typical. It has often been observed by Lang, Shewan, and others that the abbreviated texts of the higher critics introduce greater inconsistencies and more improbable and abrupt transitions than any that they are designed to remedy. The omission in some such reconstructions of the ὥς that normally applies a Homeric simile would be a special instance of this. Thus Wilamowitz (*Die Ilias und Homer*, p. 153) regards the last ten lines of *Iliad* xvii and the first line of xviii as an interpolation with a purpose and affirms that xviii. 2 appropriately follows directly on xvii. 751. It is not necessary to waste Greek type in reprinting the whole. There are many other objections to this re-writing of the text,¹ but what concerns us here is that xvii. 751 is the last line but one of an elaborate simile shorn of its pointing line with ὥς and that Wilamowitz' text makes

'Αντίλοχος δ' Ἀχιλλῆι πόδας ταχὺς ἄγγελος ἦλθε

follow directly this κόλος simile without any mitigating or mediating transition. Homer does not turn such sharp corners.

A more doubtful case is the comparison in *Iliad* xvi. 155–57 of the Myrmidons to a troop of wolves, which Wilamowitz wantonly emasculates by the omission of 156–66. His only arguments are the possibility of making sense and the "logical" objection that in 156 all the Myrmidons are armed (πάντας. Wilamowitz' own text is

¹ Drerup argues that the accumulation of similes here is designed to mark a division in the action of the poem.

πάντη,) and that in 164 it is the *Μυρμιδόνων ἡγήτορες ἡδὲ μέδοντες* that throng about Achilles. The longer simile is more effective poetically and is naturally employed at so great a crisis of the action. The point of comparison is not, as Wilamowitz seems to think, that both wolves and Myrmidons are fed up¹ and ready to fight. It is merely the general impression of fierceness and more particularly the rush of the pack. To Homer's feeling the words that carry the comparison somewhat imperfectly were probably *καί τ' ἀγέληδόν ἴασιν* (160) and *ἀμφ' . . . ῥέοντ'* (165-66). The image is the pack of fierce creatures animated by one purpose rushing to one center of their desire.

Another very interesting example is Professor Murray's suggestion that in *Iliad* xiii. 573 the line

ὥς δ' τυπείς ἤσπαιρε μίνυνθά περ, οὔτι μάλα δῆν

is added by one of the moralizing expurgators of the *Iliad* to soften the cruelty of the preceding description by some older poet of a particularly dreadful wound.

Now I waive the considerations that there are many other horrors in the *Iliad* not thus "cleaned up," e.g. in xiii. 204, xiii. 651, xiv. 499; that *μίνυνθα περ οὔτι μάλα δῆν* is a tag (*Iliad* i. 416) and that such a combination of affirmative and negative emphasis is a favorite Greek idiom.² But in his zeal for his thesis Professor Murray overlooks the fact that what he calls an inorganic line which can be omitted with no effect upon the grammar or continuity has a considerable effect upon the style. For it contains the pointing *ὥς* and the repeated word *ἤσπαιρε*, which with its convenient ambiguity of meaning ingeniously marks the point of comparison. If this line is excised the two following lines will have to be re-written or omitted with an intolerable and un-Homeric effect of abruptness.

In the parallel passage of *Odyssey* xxii. 473 there is no simile, but the abruptness would be quite as disconcerting, since if the line is cut out we are no longer told in the explicit Homeric manner that the guilty girls did actually die.

¹ Düntzer, on the contrary, *Homerische Abhandlungen*, p. 485, says that the wolves have had only one deer between them, which has only whetted their appetites.

² Cf. *Odyssey* xv. 494.

And to account for the retention by the expurgators of the ghastly mutilation of Melanthius, Professor Murray is compelled to resort to the ingenious hypothesis that the civilization of the *Odyssey* had advanced to the precise point where the torture of women was unpleasant even to an audience which approved the cruelty to the goatherd.

It may of course be argued as an afterthought that the rule is not absolute, and that the Homeric simile sometimes omits the pointing *ὥς*.¹ But the few examples of this in very brief and sketchy similes (*Iliad* ii. 394, iv. 462, xviii. 600) or with use of *ἵκελος* do not affect the principle of Homeric composition or justify conjectures that violate it. One result of this conventionalized form and this intellectualized logic is that Homer cares less than a modern poet would for the dignity and congruity of the emotional suggestions of his comparisons. The shocked critics of pseudo-classicism from Vida down would not see that he does not compare Ajax to an ass, but his conduct in a given situation to that of an ass in like case.² A reader who accepts this plea will feel no impairment of the hero's dignity in the comparison of Odysseus on his restless couch to a haggis turning on the fire (xx. 25), or in the comparison of him to a polyp (v. 432), to a rider astride a ship timber (v. 371), to a spark of fire in the ashes (v. 488), to a bat (xii. 433) in the image that illustrates his difficult situation at the end of the twelfth *Odyssey*, or in that which likens his tunic to the scales of an onion. It would be idle to deny that this is in the main Homer's practice. There are too many examples of homely, trivial or, as the pseudo-classicist would say, low similes employed with entire indifference to the effect of their connotations on the dignity of the theme.

Objection has been raised on this score to Achilles' comparison of himself to a bird, or, as some will have it, to a hen (*Iliad* ix. 323). The comparison of Penelope to a lion (*Odyssey* iv. 791) has been thought unbecoming. Homer thought only of the point, *μερμήριξε*, and its synonym *ὀρμαίνουσιν*.

There is little epic dignity in Odysseus' comparison of his men to calves capering about their mothers (*Odyssey* x. 410 ff.), in the

¹ Cf. the statistics in Keith, *op. cit.*, pp. 134-35.

² Many of the older critics of course did understand this. Cf. Finsler, p. 105.

courage of a fly (*Iliad* xvii. 570), or in the cauldron that boils melting the lard of a fattened hog (xxi. 362).

This prevailing practice, though it creates a presumption, would not absolutely exclude the occasional conscious use of the pathetic fallacy in similes intentionally adapted to the feeling of their context. Whether or how often Homer actually does this is a question of fact and the interpretation of particular passages. In the cases alleged by Wilamowitz, Drerup,¹ and others I find none that is entirely convincing. Wilamowitz' chief example is the comparison at the end of the eighth book of the watchfires of the Trojans to the stars, which he thinks symbolizes the joyous confidence of the Trojans, and the, as he believes, consciously contrasted image at the beginning of the ninth book that compares the agitations of the Greek mind to a dark sea rent by contending winds from Thrace.

Wilamowitz is so sure of this that he deems anyone who cannot feel it outside the pale of rational discussion. And a reader who is accustomed to the sentiment of modern poetry and who recalls the phrase in the first simile "and the shepherd's heart is glad" will esteem it a plausible and happy thought. Yet a very slight consideration of Homer's habitual style renders it more than doubtful. Wilamowitz contemptuously dismisses what we have called the logic of the Homeric simile as only an insignificant convention in the transitions by which they were introduced. But we have seen in too many cases that this logic is for Homer essential and that he is indifferent to the congruity of the emotional tone. The congruity happens to exist in this instance. But there is no reason to suppose that for Homer the phrase γέγηθε δέ τε φρένα ποιμήν had any more significance outside of the picture than have the countless details irrelevant to the point of comparison that complete the image in other similes. The essential point for him was that the watchfires were as numerous as the stars. After that the development of the picture had presumably the same literary purpose as in other Homeric similes. And as this purpose does not usually include *Stimmung* or pathetic fallacy there is a presumption that nothing of the kind is intended here. On this point, however, opinions may differ. But of the other simile there is more to be said. We do not need to

¹ *Das fünfte Buch der Ilias*, p. 374.

account for that by an intention of contrast to the radiant moonlight scene. That is already left far behind and Homer, as Matthew Arnold said, moves on and away quickly. The simile of the storm-vexed sea is sufficiently explained by Homer's habit of comparing the passions and agitations of the mind to the forces of nature¹ and especially to winds and waves. The key-words here starting from *βεβολήατο* are *ὀρίνετον* frequently used of emotion, but applicable also to the sea and in the pointing of the comparison the virtual synonym *ἐδαίζετο* often used in this type of simile. So in xiv. 16 ff. in the comparison of Nestor's hesitation to a poised wave² *πορφύρη* is picked up by *ῥρμαινε* reinforced by *δαιζόμενος*. So again in xv. 623 in a simile that faces both ways and has two points of comparison *ἐδαίζετο* in the application is used as a synonym to pick up the second point of comparison *τρομέουσι δέ τε φρένα ναῦται*. And in *Odyssey* xix. 521 with even greater subtlety and power of abstraction the turns and changes in a nightingale's song symbolize the alternations of indecision in Penelope's mind—521 *θαμὰ τρωπῶσα*, 524 *δίχα θυμὸς ὀρῳρέται ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα*. In xvi. 297 ff., where a few lines of the moonlight scene are repeated, Wilamowitz (p. 134) thinks that the image expresses the joy of the Greeks in their rally. But that is because he fails to see, what the ancients and Mr. Leaf understand, that for Homer the logical point was the brief glimpse of the heavens when a cloud opens or breaks away and the brief respite granted to the Danaans. This is more implicit than usual and disappears in mistaken English versions of *κινήση . . . νεφέλην* which misled Mr. Mackail.³ But *ὥς . . . τυτθὸν ἀνέπνευσαν* would remind a Greek reader of the proverbial *ὀλίγη δέ τ' ἀνάπνευσις πολέμοιο* (*Iliad* xi. 801) and make the meaning plain. In the following similes of the storm-cloud, 364, and the flood, 384 ff., Wilamowitz sees a reflection not of the presumably still greater joy of the Greeks but of the distress of the Trojans. It would be childish, he says, to look for the *tertia comparationis* (p. 134). But in 391 and 393 Homer's logical

¹ Cf. Alfred Benn, *Philosophy of Greece*, p. 17: "In the Homeric simile we find nature as force penetrating into the depths of man's soul so that his distracted purpose is illustrated by a wave torn between contending winds, his waxing wrath by rising smoke, his multitudinous thoughts by thick falling raindrops or snowflakes."

² Cf. *Iliad* xxi. 551, *Odyssey* iv. 427.

³ Cf. my review in *Classical Weekly*, IV, 9.

conscience constrains him to add this childish thing in the explicit words *μεγάλα στενάχουσι*. If they were not to his feeling essential, why should he do so? It cannot be said that they are here transitional and used only to bring in the simile. The briefer simile 364 is one of the least explicit in Homer. But the familiarity of the comparison of an army to a *νέφος* may heal that. The most plausible of Wilamowitz' examples are the similes of the beacon fire and the trumpet that signalize Achilles' reappearance at the trench and his shout (*Iliad* xviii. 207 ff.). Here for Wilamowitz (p. 168) the essential is that a beacon fire signals for help and a trumpet call may bring salvation such as Achilles brought to the Greeks. There are few absolutes in literary criticism and it would not affect our conception of Homer's predominating and presumptive intentions if we conceded the possibility that Wilamowitz' idea may have flitted across the consciousness of the poet or occurred to some Homeric readers. But in both of the similes the *tertium comparationis* is explicitly expressed in accordance with the precedents of Homeric art. Cf. 207 with 214 and 219 with 221. Another case in which, while emphasizing the distinctive feature of the Homeric simile, we must admit the possibility of other suggestions, is the comparison in *Iliad* iv. 483, of Simoeisus to a felled poplar. Did Homer consciously feel the pathos that Arnold's imitation makes explicit to us?

For very young he seemed, tenderly reared,
Like some young cypress, tall and dark and straight.

Are we to think with Mure of the resemblance of the slender youth with his plumed helmet to a Lombardy poplar, trimmed to the leafy top, or shall we say, with Madame Dacier (Finsler, p. 401), that the poplar that grows by the water is chosen because Simoeisus was born by a river? Is *ὥς* more frequently used in comparisons that turn on a single precise point, and is *τοῖον* the mark of a broader or more elaborated simile? It is perhaps wiser not to dogmatize. Again, however Homer may have felt *ἰάνθη*, *Iliad* xxiii. 599, he did not by *φρίσσουσιν ἄρουραι* intend Arnold's

A shiver runs through the deep corn for joy.

For the rest the expression *Stimmungsbild* is ambiguous and the other arguments by which Wilamowitz supports his thesis are

fallacious. Other critics understand by the phrase *similes* directly and unmistakably expressive of feeling, in which the feeling is the *tertium comparationis*. Such is that at the beginning of the seventh book of the *Iliad* (4-7) which Matthew Arnold reproduces with the emphasis of imitation in his

And *dear* as the wet diver to the eyes
Of his pale wife who waits and weeps on shore,
By sandy Bahrein, in the Persian Gulf,
Plunging all day in the blue waves, at night,
Having made up his tale of precious pearls,
Rejoins her in their hut upon the sands—
So *dear* to the pale Persians Rustum came.

There are in this sense many *Stimmungsbilder* in Homer, some of which in fineness of observation and sympathy of sentiment go far beyond the simple pattern just quoted.

They have often been collected¹ and it is unnecessary to transcribe them in full again. Such are e.g. the comparison in *Odyssey* viii. 522 ff., of Odysseus weeping to a woman mourning her slain husband, where *ἐλεεινὸν* is the carrying word. In the other type of simile it might have been the word *ῥήκετο* with which the simile begins, and which in the more subtle and difficult comparison of Penelope's waning cheek and weeping eyes to melting snow (*Odyssey* xix. 204) is repeated five times.² Other examples are *Iliad* xxiii. 222; *Odyssey* xvi. 17, V. 394, *ἀσπάσιος* three times, as in *Odyssey* xxiii. 233-39.

A commonplace but otherwise unobjectionable example is the comparison in *Iliad* xxi. 522 ff. of Achilles who caused toil and griefs to the Trojans to the smoke from a burning city which causes toil and griefs to many. Mr. Leaf's comment that according to the actual words they are compared to the rising smoke, overlooks the Tegea epigram, and Euripides, and the symbolic significance of the smoke from a captured town, but it is high comedy that Wilamowitz should rebuke him: "so eng logisch soll man homerische Gleichnisse nicht behandeln" (p. 92).

¹ Cf. Cauer², 415 ff.

² Hermogenes, Spengel, ii. 428, cites this as an illustration of Homer's tact. He perceived that when no other word was so good an ostentatious variation of synonyms would be out of place.

Homer normally expressed emotion in this direct, simple way. It was for him an adequate expression, and it is a mere obtrusion of modern sentiment when Wilamowitz affirms that the chief purpose of the elaborate nature simile was to shadow forth by indirection and allegory feelings which the poet lacked the language to express otherwise. That is to exaggerate the thesis of Schneidewin (*Homerische naïvetät*), who finds in every case where the Homeric man refrains from sentimental and romantic expansion an example of tongue-tied naïveté and resourcelessness in expression. Neither Homer nor his personages magnify and analyze feeling as the heroes of modern realism and romance do. But quite apart from the express similes of feeling a study of some Homeric effects of emphasis, epithet, contrast, and the use of the particles would reveal him capable of expressing delicacies of sentiment which often escape the observation of the very critics who harp on his limitations. The ancients who found all the niceties of later rhetoric and poetics anticipated in Homer were nearer the truth than is Remy de Gourmont for instance, who explains the similes as compensation for a defective vocabulary—"on dirait que l'auteur manque de mots"—and who never having seen the collections of Professor Keith (*op. cit.*, pp. 33-37) actually affirms that Homer has no metaphors: "Homère ne peut pas dire baigné dans son sang; c'est une métaphore." But that is another subject.

The alleged irrelevance and inappropriateness of similes in their present setting is a favorite argument of the higher critic in support of theories of the composition and interpolation of the Homeric poems. It is conceivable, though rarely verifiable, that in some cases such conjectures may hit the truth. But the systematic application of the method always leads to misinterpretation. Wilamowitz employs it frequently. A notable specimen of this logic is Wilamowitz' athetizing (p. 129) of the comparison (*Iliad* xvi. 352-57) of the retreat of the Trojans to the flight of a flock of kids assailed by wolves. The simile occurs at the proper interval to relieve some rather dreary fighting. For Homer the point lies in the repeated ἐπέχραον 352, 356; and, less obviously to the modern reader, in the balancing equivalence of ἀνάλκιδα θυμὸν ἐχούσας (355) with λάθοντο

δὲ θούριδος ἀλκῆς (357). There is no reason for excising it except the bare possibility of making continuous sense without it. Wilamowitz, however, finds its details inconsistent with the following statement that Hector with skill in warfare tried to cover the retreat and save his comrades. Such a covered retreat he thinks incompatible with the φόβοιο δυσκελάδου, which of course is a mere synonym and tag that it is uncritical to press in this fashion. He also finds it unthinkable that Hector's skill in war should be praised immediately after a simile which explains that the kids in question were cut off from their mothers by the carelessness of the shepherd. That is the fallacy of *Stimmung* already described. In *Iliad* viii. 340 he (p. 39) actually misinterprets ἐλίσσόμενον τε δοκέει, "so oft es einen Seitensprung macht, einen Haken schlägt," in order to confirm the fancy that Homer is really thinking of a hare hunt, but does not like to compare the Achaeans to hares. Of course if we construe the Greek correctly it is plain that the dog is not watching to see which way the lion-hare will jump in its endeavor to escape, but is wary of the moment when the lion may turn and stand at bay. Mülder (*Die Ilias und ihre Quellen*) finds confirmation of his theory that Homer was working over old material in the excessive number of similes employed at crises of the action to disguise the poet's ignorance of military tactics, and in the fact that the point of comparison is often slight and used merely to drag in the matter. All the lion similes for example were developed out of one great typical lion scene. The triumph of this method is its application to the comparison, in Patroclus' taunt, of Kebriones plunging wounded from his car to a man diving for "oysters" (*Iliad* xvi. 740-48). Mülder disregards the conventional Homeric logic of the repetition of the key words ὡς ρεῖα κυβιστᾷ. He will have grounds more relative than this and finds them in his own happy fancy that the oysters are Kebriones' eyes struck out by the stone which Patroclus hurled and lying in the dust before his car. That he thinks introduces *Stimmung*. But the ordinary interpreter of Homer, he sadly adds, is insensitive to these refinements.

Professor Murray lends the charm of his persuasive manner to this scientific method. The poets of our *Iliad* scarcely need to have seen a lion, he thinks. They have their store of traditional similes.

. . . . But a good many of them are not applicable to the case for which they are used. He then gives four pages of illustrations of this inappositeness. He will, I am sure, pardon me if I endeavor to show that every one of his examples is wrong, that is, involves a misapprehension of the text. That is at least a tangible issue—a question drenched in matter as Matthew Arnold put it. His first instance is the comparison in *Iliad* xii. 41 of a lion or boar at bay and vainly trying to penetrate a column of hunters to Hector temporarily baffled but wheeling about and urging his men to the attack. Homer marks the point (the logic is imperfect) by the repeated *στρέφεται* 42 and 47 resumed with *ὥς* in 49 by the synonym *εἰλίσσεται* (cf. xvii. 283) for which without warning the reader Professor Murray prefers *ἐλλίσσεται* “besought” which makes the *ὥς* absolutely pointless.¹ He asks us to consider this simile in detail. His own report of the details is anything but critical. The situation symbolized by the simile, he says, is “a hero left alone, hard pressed by enemies, but refusing to retreat.” “But the Greeks,” he says, “are flying and Hector pursuing them back beyond the walls.” Say rather that they have taken refuge within and about the wall *ἐλμένοι ἰσχανόωντο* and are there massed against attack. The Trojans have not yet crossed the ditch and Hector does not penetrate the wall until line 470. Professor Murray sums up, “Hector urging on his conquering comrades is really not particularly like this surrounded and baffled lion whose daring is his death.”

But in fact Hector, though the Greeks give way before him as the hunters before the lion when he charges, is for the time being baffled, and his conquering comrades shrink from crossing the ditch. Miss Stawell (*Homer and the Iliad*, p. 54) sees clearly that “this is to miss the point of the simile by pressing the details.” Yet she herself I think concedes too much to the *Stimmung* fallacy when she finds in “whose daring is his death” a sentimental reference to Andromache’s words to Hector in *Iliad* vi. 407. The phrase in such a simile is a

¹ Nearly the reading of the manuscripts, but there were ancient variants. Wilamowitz, p. 211, in his paraphrase ignores the *στρέφεται* and with his “Wandte . . . und bat” seems to accept both texts at once for the other word unless he expects us to translate *δρύνων* “bat.” I do not intend to impute motives. But if the argument is sound why not quote and translate correctly?

mere tag. Compare *Iliad* xvi. 753. Professor Murray can even tell us where the simile so inappropriate here is really in place. It originally belonged to the description of Ajax covering the Greek retreat in the eleventh book. Ajax is there compared to a lion baffled in a night raid (cf. *Class. Phil.*, XVI, 76) and to an ass (cf. *supra*, p. 245). The rhapsode also found in some manuscripts our present simile there. It was not needed but was too good to lose. So he kept it by him and the mention of a wall reminded him of the comparison of the hunters to a wall and he put it there. "Does this explanation fail to carry conviction?" Professor Murray asks. It does, if for no other reason, because he is thinking in English. A *πύργος* is neither literally nor in its military sense a *τείχος*. And *πυργηδὸν . . . ἀρτύναντες* does not mean "they set themselves as a wall," but as Leaf's note renders it "in serried ranks" (cf. *Iliad* iv. 334).

His next example is the two similes that compare the Lapiths defending the gate, first to two high-crested oaks, and then to wild boars: "People who stand firm in front of a gate are not very like wild boars that rush out and tear up the undergrowth making a noise with their tusks."

That has a plausible sound, but by parity of reasoning we could argue that Stonewall Jackson's name became a misnomer if he ever charged at the head of his troop, or that Tennyson could not possibly have compared his Princess to a stately pine set in a cataract on an island crag and to a bell that tolled ruin from an earthquake-shaken tower, or with Wilamowitz that "throned dawn" must really be flowery dawn (*θρόνα*, p. 31: "wie kann das Morgenrot sitzen auf das man wartet?").

Professor Murray's account aggravates the contradiction between the two Homeric similes by the comment: "a moment after we are told of the same two men . . . out they charged," etc. It is not a moment after but full ten lines, which in the swift Homeric narrative is a long time.

But that is not all. Professor Murray ignores the entire logical framework that harmonizes and smooths the transition between the two images. It is almost painfully explicit. After the comparison

to the firm-rooted oaks Homer adds, "So they abided the assault," etc. Four lines of description of the assault follow with many proper names. Then Homer continues, "They for a time had been urging the Greeks to defend themselves within the walls¹ . . . but when they marked the attack on the wall, . . . then darting forth like boars," etc. The boars too abide at first and then charge. The *μίμνον*, etc., of 136 corresponds to the *δέχεται κολοσυρόν* of 147; the *ἀΐξαντε* is repeated by *ἀΐσσοντε* of 148, and then, as the simile is somewhat long, it becomes a double-header, and the *κόμπος ὁδόντων* of 149 is finally picked up by *ὥς τῶν κόμπει χάλκος*. Homer was resolved that there should be no misunderstanding of the situation. But he did not foresee the higher criticism. Professor Murray's explanation is that there were two versions of the story and two similes too good to lose. "So the last compiler puts in the wild boars, and soothes the imagination . . . by explaining that the point of similarity lies in the noise." This of course overlooks the elaborate parallelism that we have already pointed out. In a footnote Professor Murray recognizes in different language what we have called the double-headed type of simile, but thinks this an extreme and improbable instance. He illustrates his point by *Iliad* xv. 623, where he says that Hector's onset is compared (1) to waves falling on a rock which stands immovable, (2) to a wave crashing down upon a ship which is badly shaken; then came v. 629, "Even so was the spirit of the Achaeans shaken within their breast," which he thinks the minstrel added to relieve the inconsistency. Again he is thinking in English, and without regard to Homer's style. Homer is too abstract and logical for modern geniality and breadth. In the first simile Hector's onset as such is not compared to the waves, but the Greek army in compact column is compared to the rock. In the second simile Hector falls upon them like a wave, but there is not a word about the ship being shaken—it is hidden in foam and spray. The comparison as we have already seen (*supra*, p. 247) turns on *τρομέουσι δέ τε φρένα ναῦται* (627) and *ὥς ἐδαίξετο θυμός* (629). Professor Murray's final example is an oversight such as may happen to any scholar, but as he says that it makes of this

¹ I prefer *έοντας* but it matters little.

hypothesis almost a certainty I must use it to show the quality of the certainties of disintegrating Homeric criticism. In xii. 167, in Professor Murray's version, the leader of the Trojan assault cries, "These men are like a swarm of bees or wasps who have built their nests beside a rocky path and pour out to fight with hunters to protect their young." "That comparison," he comments, "can scarcely have been invented to describe two solitary heroes standing in front of a gate. It may well have described a great mass of Greeks pouring out through the gate. But that was part of the rejected story. It belonged to the same version as the rushing wild boars."

It will hardly be believed that there is no word in the entire passage that remotely suggests "pouring out." Professor Murray has inextricably mixed in his notes or in his memory this wasp simile with a totally different wasp simile in xvi. 259-67, where the keywords are *ξεχέοντο* and *ἐκ νηῶν ἐχέοντο*. In the present simile the point of comparison is the very different one, *οὐδ' ἀπολείπουσιν*, xii. 169, with *οὐκ ἐθέλουσι* . . . and *χάσασθαι* which is perfectly pertinent to the situation. Compare *Iliad* xxi. 577, *οὐκ ἀπολήγει*, with 580, *οὐκ ἔθελεν φεύγειν*, where again the obstinate courage, the refusal to yield, is the point. Wilamowitz (p. 216) objects, "denn die Bienen schwärmen ja gegen die Räuber aus." Homer is aware of that but it is not his present point. *οὐδ' ἀπολείπουσιν* κ.τ.λ. means that they stubbornly refuse to abandon their home. It neither affirms nor denies that they swarm out of it to fight. Homer is too subtle for the concrete thinking modern.

I am not unaware of the feeling of opposition that these reiterated negations will call forth in some readers. But what are we to do? Is not the criticism that concerns itself mainly with picking flaws in Homer quite as "negative" as that which points out the errors of the critic? On which side is the burden of proof? We have seen that not one of these examples will bear confrontation with the Homeric text. Is it not "up to" the deniers of Homer¹ to

¹ Professor Murray now says (*Classical Review*, June, 1922), "We all believe in the unity of Homer." But at the same time he cites the indebtedness of Shakespeare to his sources as an argument against the unitarians. Of course any reasonable unitarian will be content with as much unity and personality of authorship for Homer as we assign to Shakespeare.

produce better examples, or to name one treatise on the higher criticism of Homer of the soundness of whose scholarship they will make an issue, or else to abandon the claim that they are speaking in the name of "science," and that the sentimental unitarian is unwilling to "face the truth?"

The purpose of the Homeric simile can only mean what we feel to be its literary effect and our divination of the poet's intention. In this sense its chief purpose in the extant epic is obviously to relieve the monotony of the fighting by the interspacing of these little cameos of the larger life of nature and man that encompasses the turmoil and hell of battle. There are about two hundred similes in the *Iliad* and less than fifty in the *Odyssey*. And within the *Iliad* the similes are most frequent in the battle books and very rare elsewhere, e.g. in Books i, xxiii, xxiv, ix, x, xviii, and xix.

Without the similes the *Iliad* would be a very imperfect picture of Homeric life, and many matters of interest are mentioned only in the similes. In the speeches Homer employs some similes much as a later writer might use them. But the formal conventionalized epic simile with repeated point and pointing *ὡς* he felt would be inappropriate to oratory and he rarely employs it there. This, of course, is not a rejection of all other effects and intentions that critics have felt in the simile. There is no irreconcilable incompatibility between the idea that it is used to ornament and add interest to dull passages and the apparently contradictory opinion of Jebb and many others that it serves mainly to concentrate attention and excite emotion at the crises of the epic or, as Drerup will have it, to frame a division or mark an episode.

In the general economy of the poem the simile adorns and relieves the monotony and the painful strain of uninterrupted fighting. But in its particular context it may introduce an important personage or heighten feeling about a fateful turn in the narrative.

The association of emotion with figurative language was observed by Quintilian and is a truism of psychology. The formal conventional framework of the Homeric simile somewhat diminishes this effect for us but does not destroy it, and a succession of four or five such similes recited by an eloquent rhapsode would undoubtedly

stir impressionable Greek feeling to its depth. This kind of excitement is to be distinguished from that indirect suggestion of sentimental moods suited to the situation which we have already seen is probably not one of the conscious aims of Homeric art. We need not delay to discuss other more or less poetical values that have been found in the Homeric simile, such as the idea of Mülder already glanced at that it is a cloak for the poet's ignorance. The use of two or more similes together has been exploited as an argument by disintegrating critics. Such cumulation of imagery, though common to Homer with Pindar, Aeschylus, Shakespeare, and the Bible, offends their daintier aesthetic sense. And it is in vain that critics from Longinus to Burke, Jebb, and Gildersleeve have pointed out that in such a swift succession of images we do not realize or feel the incongruities that reflection can discover in the visualized details, but only experience a cumulative exaltation of feeling or a sense of the progress of action or description through their various phases. With imperturbable disregard of such considerations the higher critic maintains his thesis. His explanation of double or multiple similes is that the poet was drawing from a common stock or that the rhapsode was combining different texts. The favorite formula for this argument is that the superfluous or inconsistent image was too good to lose. And so the diaskeuast retained it regardless of concinnity. That has a plausible sound and gives an impression of profound insight on the part of the critic who seems to have been present at the very conception of the poems. It may conceivably be the true account of the matter in a few instances. But it is rarely if ever conclusive, for it presupposes what cannot be proved, that the other explanation is insufficient. We have already tested this argument in some conspicuous cases and found it wanting. It is impossible to foresee all its possible misapplications. We can only make up an issue by challenging the production of any appreciable proportion of double or multiple similes which without misrepresentation require resort to this hypothesis.

In the longest series of all the five similes that illustrate the march out of the Greeks to the first battle, *Iliad* ii. 455 ff., Wilamowitz finds the key in an experience denied to scholars of lesser opportunities

(p. 275): "Eine bessere Vorbereitung für das Verständniss ist es eine Parade auf dem Tempelhofer Felde mitgemacht zu haben. Da vollzieht sich alles ganz ähnlich und die Gleichnisse werden lebendig."

The origin of the Homeric simile, like most of the problems of ultimate origin, to which the present fashion devotes disproportionate attention, is a matter of pure conjecture. One school of critics affirms that the similes belong to the earliest phase of the evolution of the epic. Another is equally sure that they are late accretions, stuck on as ornaments by compilers and revisers. Still others are confident that philological analysis can determine which similes are native to their present place, and which the diaskeuasts and rhapsodes inserted at random from a common store. Once we abandon the firm ground of the traditional text, one guess is as good as another. Figurative language is supposed to be natural to the primitive mind, and it is said to abound in the speeches of Red Indians and savages. Yet nothing really like the Homeric similes is found in *Beowulf*, or the *Song of Roland*, or the *Kalevala*, or other popular and natural epics. We can only suppose that, given the idea of a simile and its use to relieve, heighten, and adorn a narrative of fighting and adventure, the logic and the instinct for symmetry of the Greek racial mind shaped it to the form it assumes in the epic, and the genius of Homer impressed upon it its unique beauty and aesthetic charm.¹ This beauty has been challenged, and the justification and the aesthetic value of the Homeric simile have been endlessly and inconclusively debated in the literature which Finsler has recorded in part. The long-tailed Homeric simile was an exhaustible jest to the champions of the moderns in the famous quarrel of the ancients and the moderns. In the long classical and pseudo-classical tradition the Homeric simile presents itself to the modern reader like the character of the Homeric Odysseus in the Greek drama, in progressive degradations. To some readers this association with the imitations of Apollonius Rhodius, Virgil, the later Latin epics, and the Renaissance epics of Ariosto, Camoëns, Tasso, Ronsard, and Milton will appeal as an added charm—a testimony to the unity of European

¹ Cf. the beautiful and discriminating comments of Mackail, *Lectures on Greek Poetry*, pp. 68 and 71.

literature, and of the human spirit.¹ For others its spell will be spoiled by suggestions rather of the travesties of Scarron and Hudibras, the filth of Pope's *Dunciad*, the burlesque of Fielding's prose. How may readers so prejudiced recapture the freshness of the original experience and become sensitized to its beauty? Some may be brought to a truer appreciation by the interpretative imitations of Arnold. But fanatics of modernity will see in these only pedantry and affectation—*simplesse*, not *simplicité*. There is but one way to recover the lost capacity to appreciate a great poet of the older world, to read him, if it may be, with the competent, sympathetic, and not too heavy-handed guidance of one who knows and loves and understands. Few students who have ever thus read any considerable portion of Homer's text think of him with Herbert Spencer as a sociological document, and not rather as a supreme poet. Few, if properly taught, will regard the Homeric similes as the quaintness and fumbblings of an immature art, rather than what they **are**—exquisite if highly conventional ornaments used with consummate skill in the decoration of a great structural whole. Virgil, Milton, and Arnold are far better interpreters of this Homeric art than is the ethnologist's conception of the mind of prehistoric man. But if we must relate them in our fancies to their supposed environment, we might, as I believe a modern critic has done, compare Homer's similes in their logical form to the early Greek geometric style, and in their content to the beautiful realism of the best Mycenaean art.

¹ See e.g. Barrett Wendell, *The Traditions of European Literature*, p. 23.